

# NEWS ANALYSIS

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## Life chopper

As everyone knows, children are not at all interested in Santa Claus, *aka* Father Christmas; nor in helicopters, either. At least, that might be the sort of view that Rembrandt, South African heart of the Rothmans cigarette empire, would take in public. No problems for Rembrandt, anyway, with flying Santa in a helicopter named after its popular John Rolfe brand, to visit the Children's Red Cross hospital at Mossel Bay. This is a popular tourist destination about halfway between Port Elizabeth and Cape Town in South Africa's Western Cape province, where some 80 000 South Africans enjoyed the world's most temperate climate (after Hawaii) over the Christmas holidays. No problems either, apparently, with the rest of the chopper's six-day visit to the town, accompanied by all the usual



*The John Rolfe helicopter flies in.*

brand-soaked hardware, where it gave joyrides for the bargain price of R20.00 (US\$4) per person. No doubt only adult smokers chose to fly in it, though some reports suggest the extraordinary phenomenon of children apparently eager to be taken for a ride—a metaphor, perhaps, of their potential as future John Rolfe customers. The example set by the driver of one of the three John Rolfe Cherokee Jeeps must have been confusing to the children—presumably trying to cut the coolest possible image, he was seen to be drinking beer while driving, but fortunately was then pulled over by a traffic police officer. Disappointingly, the helicopter carried out no rescues during its stay, despite being billed as

the John Rolfe Surf Rescue Helicopter. If the helicopter can be kept airworthy for 25 to 30 years, perhaps it could then be converted into an ambulance to start helping with the care of the smokers who may have taken their first puff last Christmas.

## Trinidad and tobacco

Trinidad and Tobago illustrates the classic predicament of many less affluent countries: its people and politicians are getting wise to the problems of tobacco, but it lacks the comprehensive tobacco control legislation so essential to stop the tobacco companies, which still see a highly profitable future there. An illustration of their optimism was the massive programme of high-profile activities which Rothmans organised to launch its Craven A brand there last November. Under the sort of newspaper headline that marketing executives must salivate over—"T & T welcomes Craven A"—a sycophantic article announced that the prime minister would be among those turning out for the brand's first launch event, to be held on the best-known promenade in Port of Spain, the capital. It added that the brand was expected "to put over \$20 million into the national economy", and that deals were being signed to sponsor sporting events, including a soccer event to be known as the Craven A Caribbean Cup.

But it was not all one-sided. First, the prime minister, Basdeo Panday, refused to attend the event; he presumably supports his health minister, who has specified tobacco as one of his two top priorities, along with AIDS. Furthermore, one of the country's leading financial institutions, Scotia Bank, chose the same time to announce that it was going to offer customers a smoke-free environment starting from January, adding to its existing no-smoking policy for staff. This prompted a highly supportive editorial in the country's leading newspaper, as well as a news story provocatively placed right under the puff piece for Craven A.



*John Rolfe hardware packs a venue popular with children.*



Delegates to the European Respiratory Meeting in Berlin last September were surprised to see this poster, obviously not in German, near the conference centre. The ad promotes the Suvani ("Cavalry") brand, made by the Turkish tobacco monopoly, promising "Pure pleasure" and "galloping freedom" in Turkish, a pledge repeated less stridently in German lower down, though warning of the health risks in German only. It is clearly aimed at Berlin's 300 000 Turkish migrant workers and their families—the main Turkish residential area is nearby.

Resistance did not stop there. One of the most dramatic, spontaneous expressions of disgust and frustration by an opinion leader came from popular singer Luciano, a major attraction at a huge concert organised by a local radio station. According to one newspaper report, the highlight of the evening was when Luciano, after walking on stage and praying for the estimated 25 000 people in the crowd, started pulling down all the Craven A banners around the stage. "I cannot come up here and sing Jah music in front of all this Craven A . . . dem trying to kill the youth dem", he explained, just seconds after the radio station's presenter had told his audience, in something of an understatement: "Luciano has a

serious problem with all types of cigarettes". If only there were more Lucianos out there.

## World Medical Association gets tough

The World Medical Association (WMA), the international alliance of national medical associations, has toughened its already strong stance against tobacco. At the 49th WMA General Assembly last November in Hamburg, Germany, delegates amended the WMA Statement on Health Hazards of Tobacco Products,

first adopted by the 40th assembly in 1988. The original version urged national medical associations to adopt a policy about tobacco, and urged them and their members to campaign against it in various ways, advocating that a model tobacco control policy be adopted. The amended version also spells out details of a model policy, but starts with a new, detailed preamble. This not only sets out the scale of present and predicted worldwide mortality from tobacco, but also focuses on the tobacco industry's repeated denials of the harmfulness of its products, and its fondness for supporting scientific research and "the preparation of reports", whose meaning will be instantly recognisable to all who have had to counter these wretched travesties in the media.

The WMA statement adds that "By being involved in such activities, individual researchers and/or their organisations give the tobacco industry an appearance of credibility even in cases where the industry is not able to use the results directly in its marketing. Such involvement also raises major conflicts of interest with the goals of health promotion." This stance will be helpful to organisations trying to persuade universities and other academic and research bodies from taking tobacco money, such as the Cancer Research Campaign of the United Kingdom, whose draft code of practice on tobacco funding of research is currently circulating among British academic institutions.

For a copy of the statement, contact the World Medical Association, 28 Avenue des Alpes, 01210 Ferney-Voltaire, France. Tel: +33 4 50 40 75 75; fax: +33 4 50 40 59 37.



Newspaper advertisement marks the launch of Craven A in Trinidad and Tobago.



Craven A advertising on a building in East London, Trinidad and Tobago.

## New resource for medical associations

The British Medical Association (BMA) has a long history of involvement with tobacco control, so it seems appropriate that it is home to the new Tobacco Control Resource Centre, established on behalf of the European Forum of Medical Associations and the World Health Organisation (WHO) European region. The centre is funded by the European Commission, WHO, and the BMA, and receives support from national medical associations (NMAs). The principal aim of the project is to encourage doctors across the European region to stop smoking, as well as to increase the knowledge and skills of doctors in smoking cessation, and to promote and support tobacco control activities by NMAs.

Although the prevalence of smoking among doctors is down to a few percent in some European countries—6% in Sweden, for example—the picture varies dramatically across the 51 countries of the European region. In central and eastern Europe, a quarter to a third of doctors still smoke. (See Davis RM. When doctors smoke. *Tobacco Control* 1983;2:187–8.

The work of the Resource Centre is being overseen by the Tobacco Control Advisory Group, which includes representatives from five NMAs reflecting the demography of the European region. It is working with NMAs, WHO, and other interested groups to collect relevant data and resources, and to offer free advice and consultancy to doctors and NMAs. It will also help provide missions to NMAs in need of help on tobacco control issues. In addition, a postal survey on doctors' smoking prevalence is being carried out, a new booklet on tobacco is being developed for doctors, and smoking cessation training materials will be offered to NMAs.

## China: rave paves way to grave

A sinister new development in tobacco promotion is the "rave", or large-scale, disco-style dance, complete with massive sound amplification, video screens, professional dancing on stage, and any number of other stimuli. Raves are not for the old, which in this case rules out anyone much over their mid-twenties; but conversely, it means that a sizeable

proportion of rave-goers are unlikely to be out of their teens. A better vehicle for reaching potential smokers is hard to imagine, especially as the rave scene can associate cigarette brands with glamour, excitement, alcohol, pursuit of the opposite sex, and the latest in music and dance.

Until recently, raves were to be found only in industrialised countries, where young people have a comparatively large disposable income and the social freedom to attend what are often all-night events. But mass communications have ensured that raves in "the West", complete with the glamour of their illicit-tinged pleasures and excitement, spread to the burgeoning youth populations of the developing—and newly industrialised—world. This has presented an irresistible opportunity to tobacco companies and those music industry entrepreneurs from the West who can turn a blind eye to the deliberate association of cigarettes with something highly attractive to young people in mouth-wateringly large new markets.

So it was towards the end of last year that China saw the first of what threatens to be an ongoing pattern of raves, in the southern city of Shenzhen, near Hong Kong. Originally, attempts were made to hold raves in China's up and coming dance capitals, Beijing and Shanghai, but to their credit officials in both cities were unwilling to allow cigarette promotion so blatantly aimed at the youth market. BAT displayed its "555" logo prominently on video screens and elsewhere at the Shenzhen rave, in addition to the usual teeshirts, caps, and compact disc samplers, and the teams of young women offering free cigarettes on trays.

The United Kingdom's "Ministry of Sound", a company that runs a successful nightclub in London and tours with disc jockeys seemingly anywhere in the world where there's money to be made, had received about US\$640 000 from BAT for arranging a tour taking in major raves in Shenzhen, Guanzhou (formerly Canton), and Taipei (Taiwan), as well as smaller events in Kaoshiung and Taichung. At the time of the Shenzhen rave, the company was planning similar raves in the Philippines, Vietnam, and Bangladesh, for which it hoped to get BAT's sponsorship, and had already organised one with Rothmans money in Nigeria. A Hong Kong newspaper reported an unrepentant Ministry employee as saying: "We're not promoting drugs . . ." and "What [BAT] got out of it was a mail-out clientele and to tap into the younger audience." Quite so.

As it happens, the Shenzhen nightclub, ironically a former cultural hall for soldiers of the People's Liberation Army, had been raided not long before the rave, and large quantities of the illegal drug, ecstasy, had reportedly been seized there. But when was the association with illicit drugs ever a problem for tobacco promotion?

## European Union moves at last

At the time of writing, the tobacco industry will be desperately crafting its strategy to try to wreck the historic ban on tobacco advertising and promotion to which health ministers of the European Union (EU) countries agreed last November. The referral of the agreed directive to the European Parliament opened up the historic, if imperfect, directive to perils from two different groupings of members of parliament, which have directly opposite aims.

Those genuinely committed to public health want to strengthen it to remove anomalies such as the temporary reprieve for tobacco funding of Formula 1 (F1) motor sport. This concession was made to bring on board the United Kingdom, which got itself into a lamentable mess by apparently pledging help to F1 bosses, possibly in recognition of electoral support. On the other wing are those parliamentarians who seem more interested in the welfare of the tobacco industry than of the people who voted them into power. They want to amend the directive too, possibly even in a way that may appear to toughen it, but that will be unlikely to have any effect for the simple reason that any amendment by either side will cause a vital delay in the earliest date the directive could be finalised, and set to be translated into law in each member country. If unopposed, this would fall within the time in which the rotating presidency of the EU is held by Britain. Any delay, however, would mean that the crucially different presidency of Austria would handle the directive's progress once it got back to the parliament. Britain, having got its F1 concession, is supportive, but Austria voted against the directive with its neighbour Germany on what appeared to be a straight industry ticket.

Germany might well hold the title "Worst for Tobacco Control" in the "Countries Which Should Know Better" category: a highly technocratic nation, world leaders in many areas of science, where neither the government nor the majority of doctors seem

yet to be living in the second half of the twentieth century with respect to tobacco. (In fact, that may be one of the main problems: recent historical research shows how the fanatical anti-smoking policies of the Nazis may have so blighted the subject of smoking and disease that for the past half century scientists and politicians alike may have steered clear of any involvement, for fear of their reputations being contaminated by the association (Smith GD, et al. Smoking and health promotion in Nazi Germany. *J Epidemiol Commun Health* 1994;48:220-3).

As readers of *Tobacco Control* will know, the importance of the directive goes far wider than the EU itself (see *Tobacco Control* 1996;5:9-10). The many countries of central and eastern Europe that want to join the EU will have to enact similar legislation to qualify for membership. Countries of the British Commonwealth, and all the other former colonies of the United Kingdom, France, and Spain, whose system of government, laws, and institutions are often still closely linked to their former colonial rulers, will at last have the right example to follow. Furthermore, it could catalyse action in still more countries, such as many in Africa, which are influenced by EU policy as recipients of EU development aid. In the long term, this must be the largest legislative challenge the tobacco industry has ever faced. The key question is whether health campaigners in the European parliament can restrain themselves and settle for an imperfect directive, and replicate at least the slim majority acquired by their health ministers first time round. The industry will be doing everything in its considerable power to see that they fail.

As we go to press, we are pleased to report that the common position of the advertising directive has been agreed, and must now be accepted by the Council of the European Union. In due course, every member state, and those awaiting membership, must pass legislation to ban tobacco promotion.

## United States: mural protest

A group of young people representing a variety of ethnic minorities recently unveiled a mural in the town of Lansing, Michigan, protesting against tobacco promotion. The project, which the young artists worked on for a month during a summer camp, was organised by Lorenzo Lopez, education coordinator of a local community centre, together with an ethnic minor-



*The Reality check report.*

ity group opposed to tobacco advertising. He is seen here with some of those who created the mural, unveiling the work as the lyrics were "rapped" by one of the team. A prime concern of the group is the disproportionate amount of tobacco promotion found in areas where ethnic minorities live, the very places, they point out, where people already suffer lower incomes, have more problems, and are more prone to turning to alcohol and tobacco as supports.

## The Reality check— a way to make tobacco shareholders aware

To make the public in general and tobacco shareholders in particular aware of the true character of tobacco

companies is an important part of a comprehensive tobacco control strategy. In May 1997, shareholders attending the annual general meeting of the Swedish Match company were presented with an alternative company report—the *Reality check*. The idea was inspired by the *Tobacco company alternative report* published by the Australian Council on Smoking and Health in 1987.

Swedish Match used to be a respected company producing and selling matches worldwide. Today Swedish Match holds 80% of the cigarette market in Sweden. Its biggest shareholders are banks, insurance companies, and pension funds. Its annual report for 1996 contains the usual figures on production, sales, profits, a generous dividend, as well as promises of expanding markets in eastern Europe and Asia.

Doctors and nurses dressed in white coats and others handed out *Reality check* to all those attending the 1997 annual shareholders' meeting. This alternative report contained other figures, such as the fact that 5700 people died from Swedish-made cigarettes in 1996, and public health comments on citations from the company report. For instance, "Many of the Group's markets are mature . . . New and expanding markets in eastern Europe and Asia are our next priority' caused us to comment: 'These markets are also mature—with respect to smoking among men, that is. So what is new and expanding? What can generate growth? Smoking among women and children, of course.'"



*Lorenzo Lopez and young artists unveil their mural as the lyrics are "rapped" by one of the team.*

Our report also identified the company's biggest shareholders and their dividends for 1996. It concluded by encouraging shareholders to reconsider their investment from an ethical perspective. "Swedish Match has an extremely generous dividend policy. Now you know why."

We wrote an opinion piece for a major newspaper preceding the event, and statements were made by two of us at the shareholders' meeting. Press coverage was excellent including all television channels, radio, and major newspapers.

Within three weeks following the event, two major insurance compa-

nies, Trygg-Hansa and Skandia, announced the sale of their shares—for ethical reasons. Follow-up letters and the *Reality check* have been sent to board members of other major shareholders. We have indications that discussions are now taking place in more board rooms. Finally we have also made use of the alternative report in attempts to influence various organisations not to involve themselves in sponsorship with Swedish Match: "You don't want to be in bad company!"

We conclude that *Reality check* has served its purpose very well: to make shareholders aware of the true charac-

ter of the company and what it stands for. The debate on ethical ownership has come to stay.

GÖRAN BOËTHIUS

*Doctors Against Tobacco*

YVONNE BERGMARK-BRÖSKE

*Nurses Against Tobacco*

BRITT-MARIE LINDBLAD

*Swedish Cancer Society*

GUNILLA STEINWALL

*A Non Smoking Generation*

INGRID TALU

*Teachers Against Tobacco*

ERIK UHRBOM

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Requests for copies of *Reality Check*

(English or Swedish version) to:

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A wall painting that has replaced Joe Camel at 42nd Street and 8th Avenue in New York City. Source: Dr John Slade.